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Agenda item
Consideration of special reports

Special reports

Note by the Secretary-General

1. At its 2004 regular session, the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations requested that the following organization present a report on its activities prior to consideration of its reinstatement of consultative status with the Economic and Social Council: International Council of the Association for the Peace in the Continents (ASOPAZCO).

Background

2. At its 2000 resumed session, the Economic and Social Council endorsed the recommendation of the Committee to suspend the consultative status of ASOPAZCO, which had been granted special consultative status in 1999.

3. At the 2004 regular session of the Committee, ASOPAZCO requested reinstatement of its consultative status with the Economic and Social Council.

4. The Committee decided, before considering the reinstatement of the consultative status of ASOPAZCO, to request a special report from the organization on its activities during the three years of suspension, the fulfilment in this period of the provisions of Council resolution 1996/31, the possible changes that have taken place in the organization, and how the organization has overcome the reasons for the suspension.

5. The organization submitted a letter and report for review by the Committee, which are set out below.

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In November 2004, ASOPAZCO completed 18 years of activities supporting and promoting human rights and their observance. We are convinced that the 30 points in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are, today, still the most valid and the best known instrument to make our world a better one for all.

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Our organization, even when faced with enormous difficulties and some incomprehension, has never ignored the responsibilities for which it was founded. We intend to fulfil our duties and objectives and keep on providing services to the weak, encouraging the defence of human beings and working towards the construction of a more just society with greater freedoms and peace for its citizens.

Consultative status will be one more tool to carry out our work. We believe that our report clearly explains our current priorities and indicates the recipients of our activities. We are convinced that these activities are well within the framework required of NGOs by the Council.

We look forward to continuing our work in defence of human rights as part of the structure of the United Nations.

Activities report

ASOPAZCO was created in 1986 as an NGO and a not-for-profit organization to support activities promoting peace and harmony and to resolutely proclaim the 30 points of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1948 "Magna Carta" of the United Nations. Our group is committed to the United Nations and to its subsidiary organizations in all aspects relating to human rights and freedoms.

Our association has undergone a profound reorganization since the Committee withdrew our consultative status, and we are currently focusing mainly on educational activities through programmes that lead to a greater knowledge of the 30 points of the Declaration among the young.

We believe that the school is an appropriate venue where children can effectively learn to integrate the values of solidarity, commitment, freedom, equality before the law, the right to life etc., as stated in the Declaration. The programme prepared by ASOPAZCO acquaints schoolchildren 8-10 years old with the concept of human rights.

The goal is for the children to become familiar with the Declaration and make it their own. This is achieved by reading each point, discussing its significance and merits and having each student interpret the points through drawings based on individual ideas, while staying true to the concepts formulated by the Declaration's signatories. The students themselves then select the best graphic depictions of the 30 articles. Through this programme the children, our future citizens, get to know the Declaration as part of their early education.

This programme was presented to the community of Madrid; 20 schools were visited and presented with the proposal and 12 put it in practice. The drawings were so numerous that ASOPAZCO is now preparing a public showing for the students and parents from these schools. ASOPAZCO intends to continue with this type of activity, adding new schools and more students.

To complete the cycle, ASOPAZCO prepared an additional programme for secondary level students as an extracurricular activity. This programme has been presented to various civic and cultural centres, to parents' organizations and to other NGOs. The theme of the programme is "And I, what can I do?"

This is the question we are asked daily by young volunteers who reach out to NGOs like ours; they want to voice their concerns and find answers in the climate of uncertainty and often with lack of alternatives that many of them live in.

ASOPAZCO believes that properly channelling this discontent could set in motion actions aimed at a greater understanding of the values of respect, tolerance and freedom, which are part of the Declaration as applied to daily life.

ASOPAZCO organized a creative and rational work plan led by these young people to foster the building of an optimistic society. These youth, working on their own through a programme tailored to their needs, would be able to face the future decisively. Educational modules were devised to allow them to decide on the topics for the themes for debates.

Our goal for this year is financing a bimonthly publication with the same title as the programme, "And I, what can I do?" This would allow the students to publish works on themes related to human and social development while they are forming at the same time their opinions on human rights, individual freedoms, rights of assembly, respect for the opinions of others etc.

ASOPAZCO also intends to publish a self-help book that would include the most frequently asked questions encountered in this programme, with the corresponding answers. This would serve as a short orientation for youth that approach NGOs like ours wanting to volunteer their services.

ASOPAZCO was a candidate for a UNESCO human rights education award because of this programme. The University of Navarra in Pamplona, Spain, nominated the organization.

ASOPAZCO is a founding member of the NGO Friends of the United Nations in Spain, also through this programme. That NGO is registered with the Ministry of the Interior of Spain's National Registry of Associations as a non-profit organization. We have collaborated with that NGO and organized in cooperation with it conferences on human rights, the elimination of poverty, development and promotion of peace, and protection for families.

ASOPAZCO is working through youth education to promote peace, development and the promotion of human rights. All youth who wish to join forces with us in working towards our goals as outlines in our statutes are welcomed in our association; included are representatives from diverse backgrounds, races and religious beliefs. The idea of working with children and youth is basic to our aims since they are the ones who will be creating and living in, hopefully, a better world.

ASOPAZCO has focused its work on education but has not forgotten that violations of human rights occur daily in our world, and that urgent and specific actions are required from us as activists committed to the observance of these rights. Our organization has participated in requests for help for journalists who have been detained and/or their freedom of expression are curtailed, including journalists in such countries as Cuba (Raul Rivero), Morocco, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Equatorial Guinea.

We also joined the campaign to prevent the stoning of condemned women in Nigeria, demanding from that country's Government the abrogation of laws that violate women's dignity and rights. ASOPAZCO also asked for the abolition of child slave labour in the Philippines, Brazil and various countries in Asia. We are currently working together with various NGOs on a common report on the rights of the child and the need to put into practice the required legislation to guarantee and protect these rights.

Radio Babel project

ASOPAZCO was invited to participate in the radio project "Babel radio", Spain's first experience with multicultural radio, which was designed to promote social services and to unite immigrants and refugees so as to facilitate their integration into the Spanish community.

Radio Babel is a free and independent station supported by various entities and committed to integration and democratic pluralism. ASOPAZCO prepared an informative programme on the rights and responsibilities of immigrants and refugees of various cultures.

The programme was based on the Declaration and its aim was to give these groups effective voices within the system. ASOPAZCO's programme was aired daily and lasted one hour. It included opportunities for the immigrants and refugees to express their concerns, claim their rights and deliver their messages.

In this radio hour, we reunited friends who had been separated due to living in distant neighbourhoods, and we helped young students with their schooling and forwarded simple but important complaints from our listeners to the proper government agencies. Most of all, we listened to problems and tried to find solutions. Each problem was also paired with the corresponding article of the Declaration.

The Declaration provides the appropriate norms for the civil society formed by these immigrants and refugees within a strange country, but most of its articles were foreign to them. ASOPAZCO showed them that through these articles in the Declaration, they could defend their positions within a wider society and the human family, and the Declaration thus became for them a valid instrument to assist their development within this new environment.